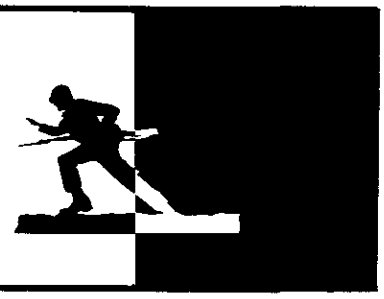
PROFESSIONAL FORUM



Advisor Lessons Learned

MAJOR MARTIN N. STANTON

I didn't ask for an advisory duty assignment in Saudi Arabia, but I did accept it. And as it turned out, I could not have made a better choice. I arrived in Saudi Arabia a year before the start of Operation DESERT STORM, when there were only a few U.S. advisors in that country. At times I found myself saying that I was at least seeing a place not many U.S. soldiers would ever get to see. Little did I know!

I went to war with my host unit and took part in the battle for Khafji and the drive on Kuwait City. All in all it was an excellent tour, and I learned a lot. As a result of my experiences, I would like to offer the following bits of advice to all advisors-to-be. It is not perfect advice, but I think it will be helpful, not only to advisors going to Saudi Arabia or another country in Southwest Asia, but to all advisors who find they must deal with a vastly different culture.

Learn as much as you can about the customs of the country to which you are assigned. At first, conversation will be awkward both because of the language barrier (a large one in my case) and because your counterparts will be "feeling you out." A knowledge of the country's history is very useful. It serves as a conversational ice breaker and also demonstrates that you were interested enough to learn something before you showed up.

A knowledge of etiquette and day-to-day manners is also critical, especially in a place like Saudi Arabia where the culture is so different from our own. Initial impressions are most important. If you can start off by conducting yourself properly and not fumbling around, you're ahead of the game and again will show your new counterparts that you cared enough to learn about them.

Another point about manners. If you do something wrong, apologize, but don't make a big deal out of it. Most people, regardless of nationality, are more than understanding with a new person's unfamiliarity with their culture. So it's not necessary to walk around on eggshells.

Getting your counterpart or his friends to teach you the language is also a good way of breaking the ice. (It's also a good way to teach some of them more English.) It shows you're willing to learn from them, which will increase their confidence in you and make it easier for them to follow your advice. Besides, knowing the language comes in handy in your dealings on the civilian economy.

Eat the food; it won't kill you. You hear all sorts of horror stories about what people eat in certain parts of the world. At least I did, and I honestly didn't know what to expect.

As it turned out, the worst I could say about the food in my host nation was that it was sort of bland and lacked variety, especially in the field. For the most part, Arabs, for example, are generally too well mannered to play the old "Let's-give-this-to-the-American-and-watch-him-eat-it" game.

There are, however, a few things to remember. As appalling as it is to us and our ethos of leadership, in a lot of foreign armies the officers eat first and the troops last. Attempts to change this are met with blank stares or outright hostility. Trying to set a personal example and not eating before the troops just means that you won't eat very much, or that you'll eat a lot of MREs by yourself. More important, meals usually amount to a large social gathering in most of the Arab military units that I have observed, and you cannot afford to cut yourself out of this interaction.

Too, in some Arab countries, people eat with their hands from a large communal dish. Just remember to touch nothing with your left hand (my solution was to sit on it) and dig in. Eating rice with your bare hands is an art, and it's good to let your counterparts teach you how to do it.

Learn the history of their army and their units. Your counterparts expect you to know something about your own army's history, and it pleases them if you respect the history of theirs. In

addition to giving you another ice-breaking topic of conversation, this knowledge may serve to clarify for you why that army's units are deployed the way they are and why they have the missions they have.

For example, the two major units of the Saudi National Guard, the 1st and 2d Mechanized Brigades, are permanently stationed in Riyadh and Hofuf, respectively, the two most critical areas — politically and economically — in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Defense's ground forces are positioned along the country's borders. There is a historical reason for this, which is much too long to explain here, but in understanding it, I gained a better understanding of my brigade's purpose and missions.

Learn as much as you can about your unit's organization, weapon systems, vehicles, and equipment. If you're to be an effective advisor to that unit, you must learn all you can about it. This requires a good bit of study on your part, followed by some subtle sleuthing.

Talk to your counterparts, and in these conversations try to discover what the unit actually has and how they operate. (Like our own Army, sometimes their authorizations and doctrinal organization for combat may not be the same as what's on the ground.) The only way to give good advice and assistance is to actually get out and look at what the unit has. Only when you have a clear picture can you begin to offer advice that makes sense.

Do not be afraid to ask your counterparts if you can go "bilge crawling" in their vehicles. Some of the officers may be shocked, at least initially, but once they realize you are not going to inspect them but are only trying to learn about their vehicles, they will be flattered that you chose their unit. The old guard will never enter the motor pool, but you may influence some of the younger officers to become more involved in maintenance. Anything you can do to better your understanding of their maintenance procedures, problems, and status will be all for the good in the long run.

Take some time and watch them. The temptation to jump right in and start advising is pretty strong, believe me. But before you do that, take a deep breath, then sit down and watch for a while. Most armies do not meet our professional standards, and you can expect that 90 percent of what you see can be fixed or improved in some way. Watch and observe for at least a few weeks, if you can afford the time, always remembering that as simple as some things seem, they may not be that easy to solve. Make sure of where you're going and what you're going to say before you start advising.

Be available. Don't expect to be accepted in the unit the first day you report in. It is going to take a while for that unit, and its officers and men, to accept you. And they will certainly observe you carefully before they trust you enough to ask for your opinion or advice.

At first, all you can do is to be polite, friendly, and inquisitive. You can offer suggestions, but not too many. And don't be offended if no one picks up on them, at least initially.

The first time you are asked for your advice you will know the unit is beginning to accept you, and you should feel pretty good about it. To encourage this, you must make yourself available. Attend all training and planning sessions. Go to lunches. Look for other functions during which your advice might be solicited.

When you're first asked for advice, be as helpful as you possibly can. If you can't give the information or assistance right then, follow up as soon as possible. Once your counterparts realize you are there to help them and that you will get answers for them, their questions will become more frequent.

Don't do their work for them. Remember, you are not in that unit to do someone else's work. Tell your counterparts how to do something, give them examples and demonstrations if you must, but do not do their jobs for them.

Be on time. People in other countries of the world don't operate the same way we do, particularly when it concerns time. Your counterparts will probably not consider time as important as you do; as a result, you may not find them as punctual as you would like them to be.

However, some of your counterparts probably do know our standards. Many will have attended a course of study in the United States or some other western country. Still, remember that our country and our Army are being judged by what you do in the unit. Your counterparts, therefore, can be late and unprepared; you must never be.

Concentrate on just a few things. You will not be able to do everything you want to do during your tour. After watching the unit for some time, pick out the most important aspects of its operations that you think you can improve. Then make a list of them in descending order of importance, and discuss them with the unit commander and his key staff members. (At the completion of your tour, pass on to your successor your list of things to do. It will show him where you have placed your emphasis and what you believe you have accomplished.)

Remember that the items you consider most important may not be important to the commander and his staff officers. It can be most embarrassing to you if, before consulting with your counterparts, you have developed some sort of grand plan to correct certain deficiencies only to find they are not the least bit interested in it. Talk to them first about what they consider the most important aspects of their training programs and their operational requirements. If you think they may be overlooking something, be sure to talk with them about it. But this is their army, not yours. It is better to help them with Item B while you're trying to interest them in Item A than to be adamant about A and get nothing at all done.

Understand your position. For reasons of internal security policies, many host nation units will not allow you to see their operation plans or study their contingency missions. Don't be hurt by this. You can learn a lot during casual conversations, though, or you can ask the unit commander directly. If he cannot answer your questions, he will tell you so. But don't ask too many, or

you will soon find that you are not only unwanted and but also distrusted. You will be amazed at what you can learn, but please don't do anything so dumb as trying to enter restricted areas or peek at files. You are not a spy; your interest is in developing a mission essential task list for your host unit.

Travel when you can. In your leisure time you should do as much traveling as possible in your host country. This will give you something else to talk about with your counterparts and will also broaden your own horizons. And you never know when the knowledge you have gathered during such travels will be useful. For example, in the fall of 1989 I would never have guessed that my knowledge of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia would be useful for more than party conversation.

Accept all invitations, if you can. The only way you will ever gain true acceptance from your counterparts is to socialize with them. If you're invited to lunch or dinner, by all means go. Find out as much as you can about the particular function and the protocol that may be involved. If you are invited to a function that will make a serious dent in your work or leave plans, make an honest excuse. Then reciprocate, if possible, either in your quarters or at a local establishment. There may be some among your counterparts that you want to avoid as much as possible; do so, but not at the expense of denigrating your position.

Remember that you have no command authority. Many U.S. officers seem to feel that an advisor is the de facto commander of his counterpart's unit. That may have been true during the Vietnam War, but it is no longer true. The fastest way to alienate your counterparts is to use your command voice with them. As a general rule, the only time you should jump up and down and start directing people is when safety is being compromised and people are about to be killed or maimed. In short, if you come on too strong you will accomplish absolutely nothing and may as well go home.

Like it or not, you must be "Mister Nice Guy." Offer suggestions in terms of "here is a technique you may want to think about." If a counterpart does something stupid, say that you have done the same sort of thing in the past and explain what steps you took to keep from doing it again. Advise and correct where you can, but don't keep hounding your counterparts about their mistakes. The worst thing you can do is to take an approach that seems to say, "I am an American and I'm the expert. Do it this way, therefore, because I said so and I know more than you do." At the same time, be prepared to defend your rationale.

Don't become one of them. Maintain your dignity at all times, as well as your own counsel. Do not become a source of supply. And don't think you have to follow all of their customs. After all, a respect for another's customs goes both ways.

At the same time, you are expected to know everything about the United States. You will get questions about all sorts of things. To many of my counterparts, the U.S. was a fabulous land of riches and wild women. Our dating customs were by far the most popular subject among the junior officers in my host unit. But expect almost any kind of question about our country; this comes with the territory.

In summary, I enjoyed my tour as an advisor. I was able to get a close and personal look at a fascinating foreign culture and to work with a good group of people at the same time.

Although the work was sometimes frustrating, its attractions far outweighed its faults. If you can be patient and maintain a sense of humor, you'll do all right, and if you're offered an opportunity like this, don't let it pass you by.

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Advanced Combat Rifle
A Commonsense Approach

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Small arms design rarely departs much from the status quo. Historically, it has evolved gradually, and significant advances have come only every few decades at best. For example, before our war for independence, the most influential firearm design was the flintlock musket. Over the years, rifled barrels were added to it, and in the early 19th century the percussion cap was invented. The percussion cap permitted the invention of the revolver, and by the end of our Civil War metallic cartridge arms were in use. The breech loading cartridge arm hastened advances, but it still took